1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER TWO

THE HOMES OF THE LEPCHAS

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133 Zongu is a roughly triangular portion of very mountainous land, approximately forty miles on each side, bounded on the south-east by the river Teesta, on the north-east by the river Talung and on the third side by the mountains south of Kinchenjunga. The land is excessively precipitous; the rivers are at about 2,000 feet above sea-level and the average height of the hills is about 12,000 feet; but the peaks rise to more than double that height, Kinchenjunga at the head of the Talung valley, which dominates the western horizon, being over 28,000 feet. Except for a few artificially levelled places there is probably not a hundred square yards of flat ground in the whole district; and the tracks are too steep and too uneven for it to be possible to employ mules, let alone horses; all travelling has to be done on foot, and all goods transported by human porterage.

361 The river valleys are hot, steamy and somewhat malarious, and consequently there are no houses right on the river, though the ground is used for raising subtropical plants; there are however occasional houses about 500 feet higher up. Most of the houses and cultivated land are between 3,500 feet and 7,500 feet above sea-level, a relatively narrow band above the two rivers, though occasionally fields are made at even higher altitudes. Above the cultivated land is the forest in which wild produce is gathered, a decreasing amount of hunting done, and to which the cattle are sent up to pasture in the winter months. Above the forest level comes first the rhododendron forest, and then the snows, rarely visited except by hunters searching either for ibex and musk-deer or for the wild aconite which forms the basis of their arrow poison.

132 The climate of the Talung valley is excessively wet, even for the Himalayas; it is only in the autumn months—from the end of September to the end of November—that there is no rain.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

888 at us with his rheumy eyes. His brain was too far gone to take in much of what was said and after making a remark, which was a sinister meaningless croak rather than human speech, he would totter off again to add a few more turns to his credit. He always reminded me of a desiccated old colonel: perhaps in some previous incarnation he had snored away long hours in some comfortable London club. Anyhow, I like to think so.

136 Lingtem Monastery has no permanent inmates. It does, however, harbour large colonies of rats and fleas. I thought at first that the nightly scufflings might be some form of psychic disturbance; and as for the fleas, once one had been thoroughly bitten they ceased to cause further annoyance.

133 The view from the monastery is, in my opinion, unparalleled anywhere in the Himalaya. The building faces due north, and directly in front of us, on the far side of the river, was a splendidly wooded ridge, the top of which was still under snow when we first arrived. Away to the left we had an uninterrupted view of the Kinchinjunga peaks, with the top of Seniolchum just visible a little to one side. This in itself was a sufficiently remarkable sight: but away to the right we also had a clear view of all the peaks forming the boundary between Sikkim and Tibet. In the centre of those was Pau-hunri, here called Nahrem Hlo, and thought [823] to be the loom of Nazong Nyu, a mythical personage who appears in many Lepcha stories.

[788] Outside the monastery was a row of prayer-flags, and a 351 number of small prayer-drums had been let into one of the walls. These could be turned by the pious whenever they circled round the building. A little below was a small bamboo grove, which contained one particularly handsome tree, which I would sometimes watch for hours at a stretch, [322 especially when the weather was stormy. Why, I wondered, 131] do we use the wood of this most beautiful of all trees to make the most hideous of all furniture? The Lepcha uses a great deal of bamboo in one way and another, but in his hands the finished product never looks shoddy and ugly. On

136

Tree fern.

133

Hillside in Sikkim.

Waterfall in the Talung.

[facing p. 31]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

though walking about was almost as difficult as on a swinging suspension-bridge. At last we were by ourselves; there was no communication between the two rooms except from the outside, but there were so many chinks in the walls that we thought it advisable to improvise a screen with our rugs and shawls, and then we were able to change our wet clothes and hang them on the many bamboos crossed above the fireplace to be dried and well smoked! We were not a little horrified to find that our feet and ankles were covered with leeches. I got off fairly well, but my husband, who had walked nearly all day, had at least twenty on him. I had knocked two off his neck before, and now he found one in his hair. When empty their bodies were like long black threads about the thickness of vermicelli, but when full of blood they were huge, soft, black lumps. It was most repulsive to have them taken off one. These hill-leeches are much smaller and darker in colour than the domestic leech, but the bite must be poisonous in some way, for, although not felt at the time, they cause considerable irritation of the skin for many weeks afterwards."

Ibid.

Monasteries.

"There is a great similarity in all these buildings, but the Pemiongchi *goompa* is larger than most of them, though the outside seemed less interesting to us, because it had a corrugated iron roof. There were also common glass window-panes round one of the altars. Inside was a great wealth of ugly idols and hideous masks, and it was painful to see our Nepalese coolie prostrating himself with awed face before the latter. Some of the frescoes on the walls were particularly gaudy and revolting; the lamas we saw here were of a low order, and had not the attractive faces we had sometimes met with among these Buddhist priests. To add to the generally unfavourable opinion we had received, some cooking vessels carried by Teptook, and which he had respectfully left at the door when he went in, were stolen,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

231 animals that in adjacent Tibet are universally employed for transport. Such loads as have to be transported are carried entirely by men. For this purpose they do not, however, [482] often use the head-strap, the commonest method throughout the Eastern Himalayas, but carry their loads by means of a strap round their shoulders. It usually takes the form of a length of creeper, torn from a tree at the time.

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[793] Lamas may not take any form of life, and men should not 231 eat the flesh of animals killed by women; but apart from 857 this there are no restrictions in the slaughtering of domestic animals. There is no ceremony when a child kills its first animal. A boy generally starts to kill chickens when he is about ten; goats and pigs four or five years later. It is thought, however, that a youth should not attempt to slaughter oxen before he is about twenty, and not before he is capable of copulating with a woman. "If he is unable to copulate," said Karma, "he would not dare to kill an ox; he would not be nearly strong enough, and it might easily turn on him. If, however, he is able to copulate then he is strong enough to be able to look after himself." I should add, however, that this is merely a manner of speaking, and that there is no significant connection between the two acts.

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● 136 The dense forests of Jongu are well stocked with deer 224 (mostly the so-called Barking Deer—*Stylocerus ratna*) and pheasants, so that by means of hunting the people are able to vary and supplement their ordinary diet.

224 A boy usually starts to hunt at about the age of fifteen, 868 and for the first few times he will go out unarmed with some experienced man. Later on he will make or acquire a bow and arrows of his own; and if he cannot make them himself he will get someone else to give them to him. He will never, however, ask his own father for a bow and arrows, unless he too happens to be a hunter, because "hunting is merely

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

that owing to the heavy rain of the last few days a great deal of the path has disappeared, as a result of which it will take us another two days to reach the monastery. Also, there has been heavy snow on the pass above, so that it is not yet possible to get from Talung over to Lachen. In view of the weather, which shows no signs of abating, everyone thinks the best course is for us to get out of this valley as quickly as possible, and we accordingly left at six-thirty, deciding to make a day of it and go straight through to Mangen, which we eventually reached at six in the evening. It looked at first as though the weather would clear, but by nine it was only too obvious that my mind was definitely not in accord with Tafoor's: it never ceased raining throughout the day. We decided to keep to the far side of the river, as the path was said to be slightly better. It turned out to be little used, as a result of which we appeared at times to be struggling through virgin jungle. It was impossible to keep the leeches away, and after the first hour or so I gave up trying. Whenever we came to an open patch the coolie who was with me took out his knife and scraped them off my legs: they were so thick that they looked like bunches of worms. It was really a waste of time, for five minutes later they were just as thick as before.

By midday we were opposite Lingtem again, where there was another bridge to cross. I had been dreading this all the morning, but actually I found it comparatively easy; having done it once gave one confidence.

We struggled into Mangen just as the mail was arriving. Nothing much to read, except my pass-book, which, as usual, shows me to possess even less than I imagined. I was wet through to the skin and had no change of clothes, so spent the evening dressed in a magnificent fur-lined sort of mandarin's robe of crimson silk, which Palden managed to borrow from a local Kazi. The coolies arrived at ten p.m.

4th June:

I was unable to move yesterday owing to my legs having

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

In another legend it is told how the bear was given to the Rong as game to be hunted. "One day the ancestor of the *ptso* was going through the forest when he came on what he thought was a dead bear ; but really this bear was an incarnation of Pong rum, the king of all animals and patron god of hunters who was at the moment taking a rest outside his incarnate body. The ancestor cut up the animal and ate part of it ; whereupon Pong rum appeared to him and said, 'You have eaten part of my body ; henceforward you and your children must serve me and worship me and make offerings to me. Henceforward also you and your children may eat all animals, even snakes, with impunity.' This is the reason why the people of Pantoong could eat and enjoy snakes, whereas the rest of us would die if we ate them."[66] From these legends it appears clearly that the Supreme God, Ta-she-thing, gave to the Rong folk wild boar, bear, fish and honey as food and taught them to use bow and arrows, to shoot the game, and to catch fish with the net.

It has already been mentioned above that Pong rum, the god of the hunters, goes by different names depending on whether he drives towards the hunters, the game from the slopes of the highest mountains, or from the foot of the mountains or the plains. It appears also that these animals are looked upon as manifestations of the deity. The following story, related to us by the son of the A-chi Bong-thing who hails from a famous hunting family, lends support to this theory. "We were hunting in the thick virgin forests at the foot of the mountains at the beginning of the plains. Suddenly I came across an enormous bull with mighty horns. The bull was asleep ; yet, the sight of this gigantic animal so terrified me that I staggered, as one drunk, to the ground and felt as if my soul had left my body. That could only be the hunting god and it was useless to shoot, as he was proof against wounds. The bull awoke, stood erect, and with a thunderous bellowing drove the cows and calves further into the forest. We withdrew as quickly as we could and fled for safety." The hunters call the Mithan Sa-dzug-big in the Lepcha language. They say that he usually lives in the higher mountains as far as the

66. Gorer, op. cit. p. 56.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
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224 Tibetan frontier, but in the winter he descends into the plains.
136 He is very difficult to hunt because he is the largest of cattle, bigger even than the Tibetan Yak, which they name Yok (clearly a rendering of the Tibetan name). They have never seen a wild yak, and so are unable to compare its size. Unfortunately for me I did not succeed in seeing a Sa-dzug-big, but I obtained sufficient information to establish the difference between the Mithan, Gaur, Gayal—a question which is very confused.

136 Great confusion is caused by the change and interchange of names. In North India we find the wild cattle called the Gaur. The Gaur (*Bos gaurus*) is an enormous animal which sometimes attains a height of 21 hands. The upper part of its neck is cylinder-shaped. The forehead is deeply concave. There is no dewlap. The horns are regularly poised and bend inwards at the end. But the sharpest curve is not at the end. The colour of the adult animal, especially the old bull, is deep brown, practically black. The Gaur has been erroneously called the bison. The very same description given by us above was given also in the case of the Mithan. The Gaur only inhabits the mountains and hilly countries and cannot be tamed. The Mithan is also a mountain animal and
136 is very difficult to handle in captivity. The inhabitants of
231 Sikkim say that the Mithan cannot be tamed, but that the
825 wild bulls do mate with the domesticated cows. The mixed offspring are then tamed. In the second and later generations there is a very marked difference from the wild ancestry. The greatest height is only 17 hands and the dewlap is developed. The horns are no longer regularly poised, nor are they curved inwards;—the greatest distance between the horns being now at the points. Even the colour is no longer identical.

Let us now explain why a confusion prevails over the names. The wild cattle in the Himalayas are called Mithan in Nepalese, and Sa-dzug-big in the Lepcha language. The natives say that the wild bulls cannot be tamed, but that they do mate with the domesticated cows. This intermixed breed is called Paluwa-Mithan in Nepalese, and Pamen in Lepcha. The ordinary cattle are called Siri-gay in Nepalese and Niu-big in Lepcha. The cross between these animals and the very

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
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small Nepalese cattle is called Pahare-gay in Nepalese and Mam-tha in Lepcha. The Tibetan Yak is called Tschangri-gay in Nepalese, and Yok-big in Lepcha. The water buffalo is Arna in Nepalese and Nin-big in Lepcha. The names Gaur and Gayal, as we see, do not appear.

The Mithan sacrifice and cult play a very important part in the religious sphere of the Nagas. The Sema Nagas call the wild Mithan "aviela," the cross of this wild cattle with the domesticated cattle is "avi"; the cross of avi achuka (black humped cattle) is aselhu, the cross Avi with Kolaghu (ordinary cattle) is avyega or vivghu.

In the Chongli (C) and Mongsen (M) dialect of the Ao Naga, cross of the wild bull and the cow is called sü and atsü (M); the ordinary cow nashi (C) and masü (M); the progeny of the above cross and the ordinary cow mukza (C & M).[67] We suppose that all the natives have such special names and that they certainly draw a distinction between the different varieties of animals. The confusion arose from the fact that the Europeans and Indians regarded the Mithan and Gayal as one (*Bos frontalis*). The wild Mithan and the Gaur are different local variations of the same animal. Apart from this, it is clear that the two different wild breeds do not overlap each other in their geographical distribution. This would have been the case if the Mithan and Gaur were two different species of wild cattle. East of the Bay of Bengal the Banteng (*Bos sondaicus*) appears as a new breed.[68]

The names Gaur and Gayal originate from Hindi. The Sanskrit root "go" means bull and cow; and gavah, the plural, cattle. The modern Hindi name is derived from these: gay and gau, cow; gava, wild cattle, from which gaur is derived; gavya and gayaval—"that which appertains to the cow." Gayal is then derived from gayaval, as the bastard is not the ordinary type of cattle but is associated with the cow.

67. J. P. Mills, The Ao Nagas, London 1926, p. 132 sq.
68. E. C. Baker, The Gaur and the Gayal, (Bos gaurus and bos frontalis), The Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, Vol. xv, 227 sq., T. R. Livesey, The Gayal or Mithan (Bos frontalis), id. Vol. p. 199 sq., W. S. Thom, Some notes on Bison (Bos gaurus) in Burma, id. Vol. p. 106 sq., W. T. Blanckfort, On the Gaur (Bos gaurus) and its allies, from the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London, Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, Vol. VI, 1891, 222, seq., M. Hermanns, Were animals first domesticated and bred in India? Journal of the Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. XXVII, Pt.11, 1952, p. 134 sq.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
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Gaval and Arna are the Hindi names for the water-buffalo. In Bombay State, as far as the Central Provinces the name Ran bhainsa, water buffalo, is used for Gaur. In Mahrathi, it is pronounced gavya ; in Tamil, katuerimai ; in Malayalam, karthu ; in Kanarese, kar-kona.[69]

The wild Gaur and the Mithan cannot be tamed. The Gayal, which is wrongly called the Mithan, has no wild ancestor, but is only a cross between the wild bull and the domesticated cow. A clear proof of the mongrel characteristics of the Gayal is this : In districts where the Gaur are numerous and therefore more frequently mate with the domestic cows, the Gayal shows some resemblance to the Gaur, —the massive build with high backbone, etc. Through the constant adding of wild blood this characteristic is preserved, *e.g.* in the upper mountains of Assam. In districts where the Gaur are rare as for instance in the Chin hills, the build of the mongrel is smaller, the ridge at the back disappears, the dewlap grows larger and the horns more like those of the cows. By the fourth generation the maternal component of the ordinary cattle is again quite dominant.[70] In these circumstances one should no longer look for the wild ancestors of the Gayal.

There is also a species of animals which the Rong do not kill, *viz.* the wild dog which is reddish in colour. Nor are they allowed to eat the flesh of tame dogs and horses. In this respect they are on par with the Tibetans.

There are legends pertaining to other curious creatures which are supposed to live in the thick virgin forests. Bōn-mān-che is the Nepalese name ; a "Wild man" who is said to be about as large as a great monkey. The Lepcha name for this creature is Sog-pa. Another being is the Bōn-sacri, the "Wild magician." This creature is believed to kidnap the children of men and lead them away into the depths of the forest, where it instructs them in the arts of magic and makes them so accustomed to the wild forest life that they shun the company of men. The wives of the Bōn-sacri are the Lidini, the "Wild wives." The Rong hunter must be proof against the attacks of all these beings, and so he pays tribute to and

69. S. H. Prater, Indian Animals, Bombay, p. 204.
70. S. H. Prater, op. cit. p. 201 sq.